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ABSTRACT

Suburban high school administrators should attempt to open lines of communication and cooperation between their schools and inner-city high schools. The quality of inner-city high schools has deteriorated in recent decades due to a variety of reasons; however, this does not mean that they should be ignored. There is still much that is worthwhile in these schools. Cooperative programs between urban and suburban high schools can be of mutual benefit. Some ways in which suburban schools can help their urban counterparts are: (1) allowing inner-city teachers to participate in suburban inservice programs; (2) having an exchange program of student bands and choruses; (3) staging athletic contests; (4) sharing volunteer resource people; (5) having student volunteer organizations serve together; (6) exchanging visits between student councils; and (7) conducting joint curriculum studies by teachers. A reconnection between urban and suburban schools needs to be made so that they can improve the future together. (DC)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Don't abandon inner-city schools

DUNBAR. WEAVER. East Tech. Crispus Attucks. Belmont. Are the names of these urban high schools familiar, even vaguely? Think back 20 or 25 years. If you knew Washington, D.C.; Hartford, Conn.; Cleveland, Indianapolis, or Los Angeles, you should recall those great names, because they were among *the* premier high schools in the U.S. They enjoyed regional and even national reputations for excellence, superior teachers and students, famous graduates who went on to leadership positions throughout society.

Today, however, we don't hear much talk about those urban high schools and others like them. Some people say that academic standards no longer exist in the embattled inner-city schools. The population has changed, critics sigh; the tax base has eroded and the halcyon days have gone—perhaps forever. The schools still stand to serve young adults, but the neighborhoods around them have crumbled—violence, drugs, rubble, and vacant lots.

I suggest school executives go back to those schools to observe, to remember, to learn, and to help. At stake is the issue of whether educators will abandon their colleagues in the inner cities at the same time the Reagan Administration and Congress are choosing to ignore the federal commitment to the people and the schools most in need. While the government is changing the rules, and while leaders in business and industry are deciding whether to expand their roles in these schools to compensate for the loss of funds, administrators and teachers must show their concern and help each other.

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What you will find at these schools when you visit might surprise you. At Dunbar (in Washington, D.C.), you still will see students preparing for college—young women and men who have rejected the temptations of the neighborhood, who have spurned junk food as well as drugs. At Weaver (in Hartford, Conn.), you'll see teachers who have spent their entire teaching careers at the school, who saw the best of times and the worst of times; they now are determined to return to high standards and outstanding student performance.

Some inner-city high schools, of course, are not easy to enter because the doors are locked. Some are scary places, with uniformed guards; hallways show signs of unbelievable vulgarity and disrespect—the mindless waste of hundreds of unmotivated students. But most of these urban schools also have honors classes, advanced placement courses, comprehensive curriculums, outstanding media centers, chess clubs, literary journals, hard-working athletes. So we must ask these questions: Do we care? Do we understand the needs of these schools? Do we want to help them?

To reestablish contact between suburban and urban schools, the suburban principal has only to ask his urban counterpart if a visit is welcome. I wager the answer will be Yes. As a school administrator, you could be the key to opening a line of communication between the city and the suburbs that eventually will involve teachers, the school board, students, and parents.

Once communication begins, you will find that suburban schools and urban schools have much in common. For example, both schools have some of the same teacher inservice needs; but while the suburban principal is planning a series of activities with his teachers, the city administrator might not have the funds (or might be unable to buck the bureaucracy) to offer an important course to teachers. Idea: Maybe the two schools can cooperate. If the schools are not far apart (the magic dividing line between city and suburb can create two worlds, even if the distance between buildings is short), perhaps you could invite the city teachers to participate in your in-service training on a space-available basis.

Other ideas: When your schools' student bands and choruses plan next year's concerts, perhaps they can arrange for some performances to take place at urban schools—and perhaps you could invite the urban schools' musical groups to come to your school to entertain, to inspire, to motivate. Both groups of students will learn. No one will be patronized; everyone will profit. Also, urban and suburban high schools in your area might have last played an athletic contest against each other in the 1960s; now, one high school plays only in the suburban league, the other in the inner-city league. Perhaps it's time to return to athletic competition so that our students can get to know each other again. If you have a resource list—people who are willing to come to your high school to share their expertise for a day or a week—perhaps

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these people would be willing to volunteer time in the city school as well. What about student volunteer service organizations serving together at the city hospital or a senior citizens' center? Exchange visits between the two student councils? Joint curriculum studies by teachers?

The point, of course, is that if we don't do *something*, if we don't try, we're sending students a negative message about future relationships between cities and suburbs. The alternative to this kind of modest cooperation: the current bleak absence of communication and growing separation between the two. Can we accept this loss of understanding and the increase of alienation?

What I suggest here obviously is not enough; it's scarcely a beginning. But some reconnection of urban and suburban schools needs to be made. We must establish communication so that ultimately we can improve the future *together*. ■